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ABSTRACT

Second language teachers are encouraged to assign multimedia projects to their students. They are challenging for the student to create, can effectively reinforce learning, and are a fun way for students to practice language skills. Rather than have students draw a poster or write a paper, the teacher can assign a presentation using a combination of media. Project topics might include: a grammar lesson; autobiography; an alphabet book; cultural comparisons; a family tree; portfolios; "book" creation; and clothing. Teachers can create their own multimedia presentations for presenting new material, reviewing old material, or creating make-up lessons. Needs include a computer with appropriate capabilities and an authoring program. Copyright-free resources are available on the World Wide Web, in the library, and on bookshelves. Training to use multimedia should be available locally; supporting resources are on the Web. With planning and clear instructions, students can develop multimedia projects even when few computers are available, particularly when working in small groups. Students who have advanced computer skills can help orient and train other students. Evaluation criteria for projects should be explicit, should be provided before the project begins, and cooperation should be graded. Student projects can be published online. Contains 4 references. (MSE)

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Multimedia in the Foreign Language Classroom

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Multimedia in the Foreign Language Classroom

What is multimedia?

Multimedia simply means using more than one medium. For years I assigned my eighth grade exploratory language students to write a story about a trip to Paris—a project utilizing one medium: paper. After I was introduced to HyperStudio, I adapted the project so that students—after doing the same research as before—created a presentation using text, sounds, graphics, video, and animation. Not only do the students find this much more challenging and exciting to create, but it is something that can be proudly presented to an audience of the entire class, not just the teacher who grades it.

HyperStudio, HyperCard, and Digital Chisel are three of the more popular multimedia authoring programs available today. HyperStudio is an attractive choice for school districts because it can be effectively used by students of all ages and subject areas. Children as young as kindergarteners can be taught to use the basic features of the program, while high school students turn out projects featuring animation and other special effects. HyperCard requires a more sophisticated user, but offers a wider variety of uses. Digital Chisel is especially useful for teachers who wish to create interactive activities and electronic tests.

Multimedia is being widely used across the curriculum, but it offers special advantages for foreign language classrooms, where teachers are confronted with the challenge of teaching four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Student-created multimedia presentations can be effectively used to demonstrate and reinforce their knowledge of the target language and culture using a variety of skills and resources. And although commercial multimedia programs available in the form of CD-ROM's have their advantages, there's nothing like having the ability to custom-design your own program to exactly fit your own requirements.

Why use multimedia?

Multimedia is a fun way to get students to practice their language skills. Designing and orchestrating a multimedia project requires them to use higher level thinking skills. Technology skills gained through the use of multimedia in school will be useful later on as the students enter the workforce. And multimedia is an excellent vehicle for demonstrating the student's progress in the target language at various levels, as in portfolios.

How can it be used to enhance the curriculum?

Many teachers assign students to write papers or draw posters; assigning a multimedia project will accomplish the same goals (require the same research and writing tasks), but will require more creativity and complex planning, and will result in a more interactive and engaging product.

Multimedia presentations can also be used in conjunction with oral projects. Demonstrating a presentation on an overhead projector while one is speaking in the target language is much more effective than index cards; it helps focus the attention of the audience, and it can be a confidence-booster for students unaccustomed to speaking in large groups.

In order to review grammatical constructions, students can be assigned to create lessons demonstrating various concepts for their classmates and/or lower-level students.

Some past projects assigned by foreign language teachers include:

- vocabulary (animals, families, music, clothing, etc.)
- autobiography (in target language)
- research projects on France, French artists, Loire Valley
- an ABC book with 6 or 8 letters, each letter with 2-3 paragraphs of information plus pictures, sounds, music
- comparison of Chile/U.S. in food, housing, leisure activities
- 6-card stack summarizing what students have learned from their keypals, incorporating 4-5 grammatical points, plus several hand-drawn graphics
- final composition class project, eventually to be published on-line
- family tree, where each member was presented on a separate card, with voice recording
- 5th year Spanish students creating a presentation on art, beginning with Picasso and his life, art, etc., to be expanded to include Rivera, Kahlo, Dali, Velázquez, etc. This is a semester-long project that they will work on 1-2 days per week.
- For middle school, students keep a type of portfolio "All About Me" where they add a page to the stack each unit of study: my family, my likes and dislikes, my house, my school, my friends, etc.
- Vocabulary flashcards with testing functions
- A "living" book where students write a short children's story
- A project on clothes for each season as well as ones you'd find in the attic, complete with animation of clothes moving on the clothes line, snow falling, birds flying, raindrops, etc.
- A stack about the school, incorporating pictures, graphics, sound, etc.

Teacher-created multimedia presentations can be useful in presenting new material, reviewing old material, or to create make-up lessons for absentees. One of my first multimedia projects was a TPR (total physical response) activity for students who missed class or who needed more drilling than we had time for in class. The idea was for students to listen to the command (Touchez la tête) and click the mouse on the picture of the head. Clicking the wrong picture gets a "try again" message in French; clicking the right one gets a congratulatory message. The advantage of this is that students can get the extra practice they need by taking the disk home or to the library, without requiring the presence of the teacher.

What do I need to get started?

The only equipment you will need to get started is a computer running the Macintosh or Windows operating system with at least 8 megs of RAM (more is better), the multimedia software, and a CD-ROM drive. The individual software program may have additional requirements. Roger Wagner Publishing will send you a free HyperStudio demo CD (for both Macintosh and Windows) at your request (1-800-HYPERSTUDIO).

Once you get started, of course, you will want to invest in some optional equipment, as funds are available. As your students' projects become more sophisticated, you will require additional RAM for your computer. Although most simple stacks will fit on a floppy disk, you will eventually want to invest in an external hard drive for storage of student projects, unless you have a file server handy. A color scanner is a must if student artwork is to be incorporated in your stacks, and a digital camera is a quick way to obtain digital photos for your students' projects. Although most multimedia authoring programs include graphics and sound, you will probably need to seek out additional clip art and photos that correspond to the culture of the countries where the language you teach is spoken.

Many copyright-free resources can be obtained on the World Wide Web. If you or your students use them, however, make sure to give the proper credit in your presentation. If you have access to the Internet at home but not at school, consider investing in a program like WebWhacker or WebBuddy, which makes it possible to "download" entire websites to be demonstrated off-line.

Over the years I have spent a lot of money on travel books for my students to use in researching their Paris projects; after a couple of years they are outdated and start to fall apart. Besides, 4-5 books are never enough for an entire class. If you are lucky enough to have an Internet connection in your classroom or library, your students will have access to the most up-to-date, authentic information available. One of my favorite websites offers wonderful, downloadable graphics of all kinds of Paris monuments, maps, and even images of the tickets you need to use the Métro or take the elevator to the top of the Arc de Triomphe! With text in both English and French, this site has comprehensive information on just about every monument, museum, or other tourist site in Paris.

Travel information is another topic my students always seem to have questions about. How long does it take to get there? What airlines fly to Paris? How much does it cost? With an Internet connection, your students can find this information by accessing websites such as Travelocity, which allow custom-made travel reservations on-line. (No, they can't accidentally make a real reservation without a credit card!)

How do I obtain the necessary training?

Training for multimedia should be available locally; check with your local university or your county office of education. You may find it more convenient to learn on your own by simply reading the manual or other related books. One of my favorites, *I Have HyperStudio. . . Now What Do I Do?*,, gives some very excellent

practical advice for planning multimedia projects in the classroom that is transferable to other software applications as well. Other resources include the electronic journal *HyperStudio Journal*, the CD-ROM *Multimedia Cookbook for HyperStudio*, and the book *HyperStudio in One Hour*.

Don't neglect the Internet for multimedia information. Most software companies have websites laden with tips for users, solutions to problems, software updates, and even sample stacks you can download. Some of my favorites are:

Roger Wagner Home Page: <http://www.hyperstudio.com/>
HyperStudio Journal: <http://www.hsj.con/hsj.html>
HyperStudio On the Net: <http://ties.k12.mn.us/~motylin/hstudio.html>
HyperStudio Network: <http://www.hsnetwork.com>

How can I organize a class project when I have only a few computers available?

Not many classrooms are equipped with enough computers for each student to have one, or even one for two students. However, it is possible to plan a successful multimedia project for your students based on the equipment available in your school.

If you have one computer in the classroom, you can divide the class into several groups, give each group one topic to cover, and let them take turns using the computer while the other groups are completing their research and planning. Advance planning on the part of the teacher is the key to a successful one-computer project. Always have plenty of research/planning activities for students to do when the computer is not available. The last thing you want on your hands is a group of idle students looking for entertainment!

If you have access to a computer lab where the multimedia program is available, you can provide the students with floppy disks (unless you have a file server, which is even better) and let them do their individual stacks there to be reassembled later on the classroom computer.

If you have three computers in your classroom, divide the class into three groups, assign a job to everybody in the group, and give them clear instructions and deadlines.

This type of project is an excellent opportunity to give students experience in cooperative learning. Most students have had little experience working in groups, and have developed few skills to help them in a "real-world" situation where they have to work with a variety of people they may or may not like very well.

The key to a successful cooperative learning project is advance planning. Arrange the groups in such a way as to have a mix of friends and non-friends in each one. Personal experience has shown me that a group with too many good friends in it tends to be off-task too much, and a student in a group with virtually none of his friends tends to be too silent or too combative, depending on his personality.

Make sure each student has a responsibility. Although every group member works on every stage of the project, it is important for each person to be charged with a specific task. For example, each of my groups has a leader, one or more proofreaders, a technician, one or more artists, a monitor (to make sure materials get put away and stacks backed up by the end of the period), and a gatekeeper (to make sure everyone is doing his/her share of the work and prevent any one person from "taking over").

It is also important to build into your plan a procedure for dealing with freeloaders. In my classroom, group members can "divorce" any member of the group by submitting written "grounds for divorce" (which must be legitimate reasons, not personal feelings) to the teacher. If the alleged freeloader is judged guilty, he is taken out of the group and given a written research project to complete on his own.

Giving clear instructions and deadlines for each stage of the project is essential, especially with younger children. "I don't know what to do" and "I didn't know we had to finish this today" are not excuses you want to hear. With my eighth grade students, I have found it necessary to check each group's progress after every step, and insist that all members of groups that are behind stay after school to catch up; in fact, I make a point of informing parents of the problem. After the first time, I rarely have problems with off-task groups. Experience has taught me, however, that if I have a large number of groups unable to complete the task, I have either made the task too large for the time allotted or not given clear enough instructions.

One word of advice: train the students to make a back-up copy of their work on a computer hard drive or file server at the end of each day. Hard drive crashes and corrupted software are a fact of life, and you do not want to see your students' faces fall after losing the sole copy of a stack that took them three weeks to create!

What if some of my students are more computer-literate than I am?

As teachers, we often feel that we have to be the "experts" of the classroom; consequently, we do not feel comfortable teaching subjects on which we are not well versed. However, students don't look down on teachers who admit they don't know everything. I always admit to my students that multimedia is a new area for me, that they are, in fact, my "guinea pigs," and that any constructive comments and suggestions on how to improve the project are welcomed. They will appreciate the fact that you are trying something new, and will come up with all kinds of new ideas.

Actually, I find that students with advanced computer skills learn quickly and come in handy as "student assistants" during the initial training period when it seems that everyone has a question at the same time. Encourage these students to try new things, such as animation, even if you haven't tried it yourself yet. Give them the manual and challenge them to figure it out for themselves and then teach the rest of the class, including you! Today's students are too dependent on the teacher for answers; letting them work it out for themselves can be a real confidence-booster.

How are student projects evaluated?

You can set your own standards, but it is essential to give the students a copy of the evaluation sheet at the outset, so that they are aware of the requirements and can plan accordingly. I have found the evaluation sheets from *I Have HyperStudio. . . Now What Do I Do?* very helpful in determining how to evaluate various aspects of the multimedia project. For example, *ease of use* is a characteristic often ignored by beginners, who get carried away with wild colors and fonts which end up detracting rather than complimenting their project because they are simply too hard to read or understand. You will want to give a grade for the technical aspects of the project as well as its content.

One effective way to help students fine-tune their projects before the final completion date is to have them evaluate the projects of other students. A student who thinks alternating the positions of navigational buttons is a good idea may change his tune after experiencing the frustration of searching for someone else's confusing buttons.

If your students are working in groups, incorporate a cooperation grade in your evaluation. Points can be deducted for missing deadlines, improper use of materials (such as not putting them away), inability to resolve problems by compromising, etc. The analogy of the employee's annual evaluation by the employer is helpful here. Employees who do their work in an efficient and timely manner, get along with others, and clean up after themselves will receive higher evaluations than those who don't.

You might want to consider making a contest out of it. Ask other teachers or administrators to choose the best project(s) and give the winner(s) prizes or certificates, plus a congratulatory write-up in the school newspaper. This is also a good way to get more staff members in your school interested in multimedia, which improves your chances of obtaining increased funding for hardware and software to enhance your multimedia program. If the students are creating presentations for younger students, ask the younger students to evaluate them and choose the best one(s).

What do I do with the completed projects afterwards?

Demonstrating your students' multimedia projects at open house or at parent-teacher conferences is an excellent way to gain public support for increased technology in your school district. Don't keep your light under a bushel!

Many multimedia programs offer a "player" version that can be used at home to show the student's work to parents. However, if the project is too big to fit on a disk or if the parents' computer is incompatible, often you can transfer the project to videotape for demonstration purposes.

The best student projects can be published on your school's website or on other websites for viewing by students and teachers the world over. It's also a good idea to look for teachers with whom you can exchange projects. We teachers need to stick together!

An excellent source of help for foreign language teachers is a listserv called FLTEACH. A listserv is an Internet mailing list that you subscribe to in order to receive messages from other subscribers (in this case, foreign language teachers) on a variety of topics (in this case, foreign language teaching). When you send a message to the listserv, the message is sent to all other subscribers, and their responses can be sent to you individually or to the entire list of subscribers. In any case, you usually get a lot of thoughtful suggestions from foreign language teachers all over the world; in many ways, it's like a support group for foreign language teachers. The FLTEACH listserv generates a high volume of email which you will need to develop a strategy for dealing with, but it is a real treasure trove of ideas and can be a great way to get to know other foreign language teachers.

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Appendix A

FLTEACH is a listserv or mailing list founded in February 1994 and running on a computer at SUNY/Buffalo. The topic of the list is foreign language teaching methods, including high school/college articulation, training of student teachers, curriculum, and the NYS syllabus. Students, teachers, and administrators interested in any aspect of foreign language teaching are invited to participate in the discussions. FLTEACH membership includes colleagues from across the United States and around the world. It is hoped that this list will also be used to foster a community in which colleagues at all levels can share ideas, outlines, handouts, and other teaching materials, syllabi, and bibliographies.

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